

The level of the sense of coherence among the youth in approved schools

(Poziom poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych)

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Abstract - The objective of the research: Is it actually the case that the modern educational and rehabilitation offer for approved school youth builds a sense of coherence, resourcefulness and meaningfulness among them, as these are factors very much essential to the adult life? To find an answer to this question, the sense of coherence level was measured among approved school youths.

Material and method: In order to assess the approved school youth's level of coherence, 40 of them were examined. The method used was The Sense of Coherence Questionnaire [SOC-29], and the results obtained were compared to those of the control group.

Results and conclusions: It was established that the sense of coherence level among the approved school youth is largely discrepant from the result of SOC-29 test as indicated by the research on healthy men of our population conducted by other authors, which may be a significant factor to the youths' failures in their "adult lives". The rehabilitation process controlled by approved schools is not effective as far as the sense of coherence level is concerned. Above all, it results in the increase in the number of juveniles within the range of 100-120 points, predominantly at the expense of the decrease in number within 60-80 points. Moreover, it was shown that in those cases where the result of the SOC questionnaire is lower than 58 points, the statistical risk of failing to achieve the therapeutic success [no increase in the sense of coherence level] is significantly high despite the on-going rehabilitation, even carefully supervised.

Key words - sense of coherence, youth, approved schools.

Streszczenie – Cel badań. Czy rzeczywiście jest tak, że współczesna oferta wychowawczo-resocjalizacyjna skierowana do młodzieży zakładów poprawczych buduje u nich poczucie zrozumienia, zaradności i sensowności, tak potrzebne w dorosłym życiu. Odpowiedzi poszukiwano poprzez ocenę poziomu poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych.

Materiał i metoda. Dla oceny poziomu poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych, badaniom poddano 40 młodych ludzi tych zakładów. Użyto Kwestionariusza Poczucia Koherencji [SOC – 29], a uzyskane wyniki badań porównano ze zdrowymi osobnikami grupy kontrolnej.

Wyniki i wnioski. Stwierdzono, że poziom poczucia koherencji wśród młodzieży zakładów poprawczych daleko odbiega od średniej wartości testu SOC-29 zarejestrowanej przez innych autorów u zdrowych

mężczyzn naszej populacji, co może być istotnym czynnikiem niepowodzeń tej młodzieży w „dorosłym życiu”. Działalność resocjalizacyjna prowadzona w zakładach poprawczych nie przynosi jednakowego skutku w zmianach poczucia koherencji. Przede wszystkim skutkuje wzrostem liczebności nieletnich w przedziale 100-120 punktów, głównie kosztem obniżenia liczebności grupy o zakresie punktacji 60 – 80 punktów. Istnieje taka wartość punktowa [jest to 58 pkt.] testu SOC-29, poniżej której pomimo prowadzonej starannej resocjalizacji istnieje u małoletnich znamienne statystycznie wysokie ryzyko braku uzyskania sukcesu terapeutycznego, w postaci braku wzrostu poczucia koherencji

Słowa kluczowe - poczucie koherencji, młodzież zakładu poprawczego.

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- A. The idea and the planning of the study
- B. Gathering and listing data
- C. The data analysis and interpretation
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I. INTRODUCTION

According to the latest statistical data, juvenile crime in Poland is still progressing, which is unfortunate. This phenomenon is more and more visible in social dimension and it needs involvement from both state and communal institutions in order to be reduced. The greatest part in fighting crime and demoralization among minors should be played by families and schools [1-3]. Also efficient work of enforcement authorities and justice system are crucial. Frequently, a consequence of crimes committed by perverted youths is sending them to approved schools. The major task of such an institution is to initialize a process of introducing positive changes to the juvenile delinquents personalities. Nevertheless, one has to remember that this pertains mainly to minors who committed penal acts, posing a threat to property or well-being of others. In the process of rehabilitating such youths it is crucial to provide them with a good role model to follow. Another relevant action is to satisfy their needs in a sensible way; it pertains especially to those needs which were neglected in their everyday lives by those close to them, be it family or school. Lack of respect towards a child's or an adolescent's needs and desires gradually establishes in him or her a sense of inferiority, which often is later on expressed by aggression towards the part of the society he or she is alienated from [4,5].

Another condition to perform well as an approved school teacher is to accept the past of a minor with all his or her faults. It is necessary to assume that a minor one deals with in an approved school is essentially a good person. It is an important message that a juvenile offender should acknowledge. A youth should be assured that in ordinary circumstances he or she can function as normally as any adolescent [4,6]. However, one may wonder whether that kind of education-and-rehabilitation approach to juvenile delinquents establishes in them the sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, which are crucial in adult life. The answer to that question was sought through the assessment of approved school youths' sense of coherence.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study group

In the period between November 2006 and November 2008, 40 adolescents from an approved school were subjected to the prospective study, their ages varying from 16 to 17. The research was authorized by the management of the facility on condition that its name remains undisclosed. The studied juveniles fill in the form twice, the second time a year after the first.

Research tool

The study was based on the results of the Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (SOC – 29, Aaron Antonovsky, 1983), which is composed of 29 questions pertaining to different aspects of life. Each question has 7 responses to choose from [7]. The sense of coherence questionnaire constitutes three correlated parts: the sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness. Obtaining high scores means strong sense of coherence.

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted to the Polish reality by the Department of Clinical Psychology of the Institute of Psychology and Neurology in Warsaw, the Department of Psychoprophylaxis of the Institute of Psychology, AMU in Poznań and the Department of Occupational Psychology of the Occupational Medicine Institute in Łódź.

Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis of the results obtained was carried out using SAS software for IBM PC rel. 6.03. Mean, standard deviation, minimal value and maximal value were calculated for each group.

In order to study the differences between mean values, a t-Student test was used. The significance level for all the decisions was $\alpha=0,05$.

Discriminative and critical threshold values were calculated and a percentile method of minimalizing a "social loss" was determined according to the formula (8):

$$P_{\alpha} = \frac{1}{2}(\bar{x}_2 + \bar{x}_1) - \frac{s^2}{\bar{x}_2 - \bar{x}_1} \ln \frac{WP_2}{P_1}$$

where:

P_{α} - threshold level

\bar{x}_1 ; \bar{x}_2 - means in the compared groups

S - standard deviation

W - weight of the data

P_1 i P_2 - prevalence of people in each group.

III. RESULTS

In the studied group of minors, the mean sense of coherence level was 98,1+32,73. Table 1 presents the results of Aaron Antonovsky's SOC-29 test obtained in the two interviews with each of juvenile offenders (the first and the second study were separated by one-year-period).

Table I. Mean values of sense of coherence in the studied

group

Value [points]	Study I	Study II
N	40	37
Mean	90,08*	106,11**
Minimal	35	42
maximal	151	158
± SD	± 29,86	± 34,08

do ### - $p < 0,05$

The statistically significant increase in the studied youths' sense of coherence level is very much apparent ($p < 0,05$). Moreover, figure I shows the distribution of SOC-29 scores among the studied minors in the two approaches.

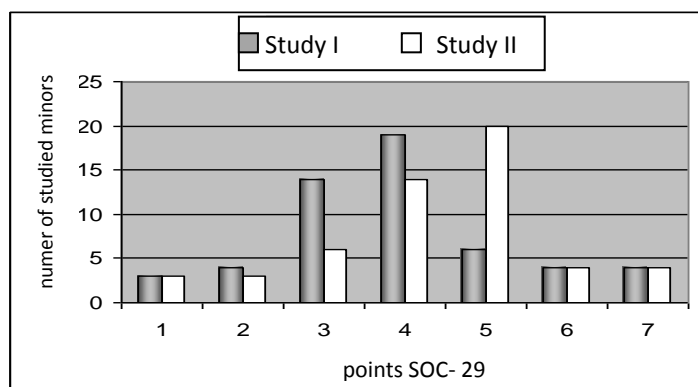


Figure I. The distribution of SOC-29 scores among the studied minors.

Grades:

1: 20-40 points, 2: 40-60 points, 3: 60-80 points, 4: 80-100 points, 5: 100-120 points, 6: 120-140 points, 7: 140-160 points

The data presented in figure I imply that the distribution of scores changed after a year. What is important is that the number of youths with scores between 100 and 120 increased, which accounted for the significant decrease in the number of youths with scores between 60 and 80. What is more, there were virtually no changes in the lowest-scoring group (20 to 40 points) as well as the highest-scoring group (120 – 160 points). The assessment of the time trend of the SOC-29 score changes among the studied youth is presented in figure II.

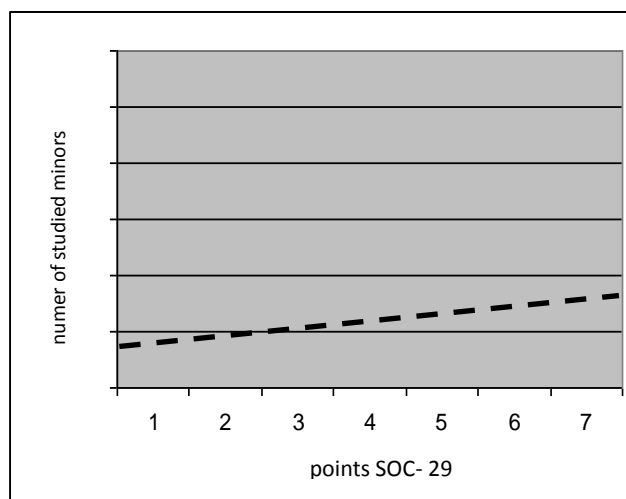


Figure II. Time trend of changes in the approved school youths' sense of coherence level

Grades:

1: 20-40 points, 2: 40-60 points, 3: 60-80 points, 4: 80-100 points, 5: 100-120 points, 6: 120-140 points, 7: 140-160 points

Figure II indicates that in the case of the studied juvenile offenders, the time trend of the sense of coherence rises in a statistically significant way ($p < 0,05$, Scheffé's method).

In the following part of the research the authors attempted to determine the specific score value of the SOC-29 test below which the efforts put into proper rehabilitation do not result in statistically significant increase in the coherence level. The findings of this analysis are shown in table II.

Table II. The threshold value of the SOC-29 test which signifies no statistically significant increase in the sense of coherence among the approved school youth.

Parameter	Threshold value	Mean error [%]
The score of the SOC-29 test	58	10,9

The statistical analysis suggests that there is a threshold value of the SOC-29 test below which minors cope with statistically significant risk of achieving no therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) even if they receive help in terms of rehabilitation. That value is 58 points.

IV. DISCUSSION

The concept of coherence stems from Aron Antonovsky's consideration of Jews who survived concentration camps. Some of the people who were imprisoned in camps have never regained the will to live; moreover, they got ill or died more frequently than their peers. Others managed to maintain optimistic approach, vitality and cheerfulness in spite of having been through similar experiences. In search of justification for different attitudes of people who experienced the same traumatic events, Antonovsky worked out his concept of salutogenesis, for which the sense of coherence idea is central [9].

Antonovsky defines sense of coherence as global and complex orientation of a human being (generalized, emotional and cognitive way of perceiving the world), which expresses a degree of general approach consisting of three basic components:

- comprehensibility connected with cognitive possibilities in the situation of a person;
- manageability which makes one see a way out of one's situation thanks to the resources one has;
- meaningfulness which determines that it is worth to get involved in the aspects of one's life. The sense of meaningfulness is responsible for what one believes is the meaning of one's life.

Therefore, the sense of coherence may constitute a determinant of those young people's activity in life and at work, especially as they approach adult life in peculiar circumstances provided by approved schools. The results of the research indicate that minors subjected to rehabilitation and approved school education have a low sense of coherence. Their level of the sense of coherence is similar to that of women suffering from depressive syndrome (with their mean score of the SOC-29 test being 99 points) or patients with neurotic disorders (their mean score of the SOC-29 test being 102-109 points). Unfortunately, the sense of coherence as measured for the juvenile offenders is far from mean value for healthy men in our population (their average score of SOC-29 being 136 points) [10, 11]. That is certainly thought-provoking.

However, the analysis of the sense of coherence changes overtime is a bit more optimistic. Here one can observe a statistically significant and therefore apparent increase (the mean value rising from 90,08 to 106,11 with a year) in the cases of minors subjected to rehabilitation in an approved school. However, that increase is not short-interval one. Their education- and rehabilitation opportunities allow them to increase their sense of coherence level, which is highlighted by the increasing time trend of the SOC-29 test scores. Nevertheless, it turns out that the rehabilitation offered by approved schools does not result in uniform change of the sense of coherence. Predominantly, it brings about an increase in the number of minors

scoring in the range 100 to 120 points, which is reflected in the decrease in number of the group with scores between 60 and 80 points. Alarming enough, there are virtually no changes in the number of the youths in the lowest score range (20 to 40 points). The highest range (120 to 160 points) also remained unchanged in terms of numbers. Many authors emphasize that successful rehabilitation depends on many factors. Our research indicates that the sense of coherence has an impact on the psychological development of an adolescent. The statistical analysis indicated that when score of the SOC-29 test is lower than 58 points, there is a high risk of the absence of therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) despite the teachers' efforts related to rehabilitation. It appears, then, that in this particular group of approved school youth the role of the staff in encouraging proper rehabilitation is increasingly important, as they have an impact on juvenile offenders' personality development. It is our opinion that the youths whose sense of coherence is below 58 points should be included in a specifically worked out rehabilitation programme which would allow them to reach a level of private and professional activity that is similar to that of their peers brought up in non-pathological environment.

V. CONCLUSIONS

1. The sense of coherence level among approved schools youth is significantly lower than the average value of SOC-29 test recorded by other authors with reference to the population of healthy men, which may to a large extent account for their failures in their adult lives.
2. Programmes of rehabilitation in approved schools do not affect different young people's sense of coherence in the same manner. Predominantly, it results in the increase of scores in the region of 100-120 points, whereas there are fewer of those whose scores amount to 60 – 80 points
3. There is a SOC-29 score (58 points to be precise) below which there is a high risk of the absence of therapeutic success (no increase in the sense of coherence level) despite the teachers' efforts related to rehabilitation.

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